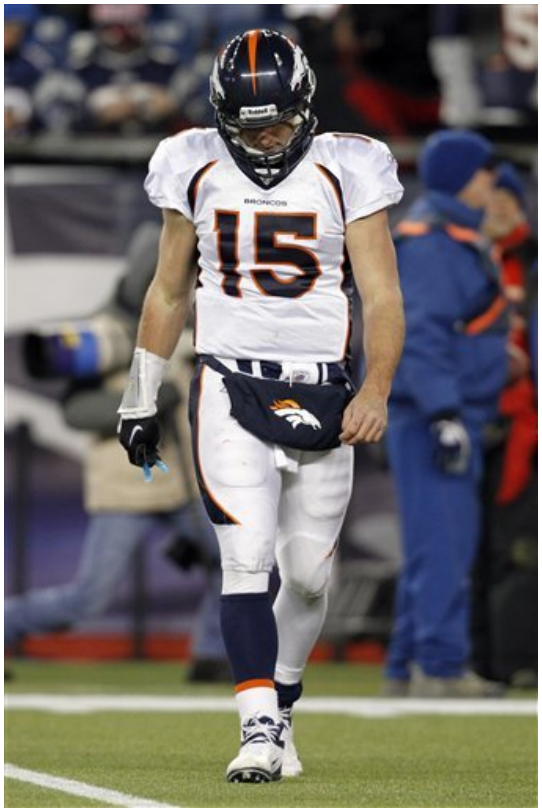

If you pay any attention at all to the sports calendar, and if you've read this column at this time of any of the last three or four years, you know that we're dead in the middle of Death Valley in terms of Cleveland sports. The Browns don't play in January, the Indians don't play in January and the Cavs simply don't carry the day. But there are some things to talk about and we'll do it once again rapid-fire style.

~ **The Patriots finally dispatched Tim Tebow and the Denver Broncos** from the NFL playoffs and the collective conscience of the American sporting public. And they did so in clear and convincing fashion that exposed Tebow's weaknesses once and for all in the Patriots dominant 45-10 win Saturday night in Foxboro.

At one point in the 3rd quarter Tom Brady had thrown six TD passes.

Tebow had thrown three…….. completions.

It was ugly.

But it's over, thank God. People can stop bitching about the attention paid to Tebow and his religious convictions and get back to watching the stuff they find much more 'real' and entertaining. Like throat-slashing gestures and end zone dances that would make strippers with C-section scars blush. We can get back to watching and celebrating guys who, instead of kneeling in prayer and genuflecting, pretend like they've shot themselves after a big catch. We can watch and celebrate QBs who have raised dogs to kill for sport and money and we can watch and celebrate QBs who terrorize college co-eds in small college towns. We can watch and celebrate guys who play football on Sunday and then supply greater Chicago with marijuana and cocaine the other six days of the week.

Those guys are real, man. Those guys are out there living real life and clubbing, whoring, borderline raping and slinging illicit drugs. They're not in Bible class. They got swaaaaggggg!!!!! And a couple of them can throw the 20-yard comeback route on a line!!!!

The whole Tebow thing has amused me all season. The kid's been treated like an asshole because he's not an asshole. That's tremendous. And, in the time-honored sports tradition, there is no middle ground on Tebow. People either love him like he may actually be their Savior or they hate him because he really can't throw a football better than you or me and he still gets more attention than anything other than Ohio State violations on ESPN.

Why the schism? Why do we have to pick a side? Look, I know nothing about Tim Tebow in reality. I've seen way too many guys put on pedestals that had bodies in the trunk or skeletons in the closet. But Tebow seems like the real deal in terms of character. Could he be Eddie Haskell and 'Sir" us to death in interviews and in his piety and still be buggering young boys or shooting heroine on his off days? Well, Penn State has taught us to 'never say never'.

But Tebow, by all accounts, is the real deal in terms of character. I don't see why we can't applaud that fact and still be critical of the fact I haven't seen him throw in rhythm or hit the 10-yard out as of yet. And even if we don't 'applaud' the kid's character, isn't it reasonable to at least **not** tear him apart for not being Mike Vick, Ben Roethlisberger or Sam Hurd?

There are people out there who have bought their kids Ben Roethlisberger and Ray Lewis jerseys that are outspoken in their dislike and hatred of Tim Tebow.

That's funny and sad on the highest level. You know what? Tim Tebow may be out of football in two years and he may go down as a huge 1st round draft bust. He may never take the Broncos to the only Promised Land most sports fans care about, but I have a feeling the kid will be okay. And if I had to raise my kids to espouse the values and character of Tim Tebow or the values and character of Ben Roethlisberger, I like to think that choice would be an easy one to make too.

What scares and concerns me is that I'm not sure that'd be a unanimous opinion.

~ **What a tremendous football game Saturday in San Francisco**. That game between the Saints and 49ers had everything you could want as a football fan: hard-hitting, turnovers, drama, huge play after huge play, an exciting ending and big plays by big-time players.

Maybe most stunning on Saturday was the fact that the two biggest throws of the day came off the right arm of Alex Smith and not from Saints QB Drew Brees. Smith's two critical throws to Vernon Davis on the 49ers game winning drive were perfect. There was zero margin for error on either throw and that was more than enough room for Smith.

I expected Smith and the 49ers to get Red Right Eighty-Eighted as they drove the length of the field for at least a score to tie the game and send it to overtime. But the skinny post from Smith to Davis gave the 49ers the TD they needed to win the game outright.

It's really hard to canonize the 49ers defense when they gave up 32 points, but that defense pressured Brees, covered the Saints receivers and hit hard enough to the point where the Saints turned the ball over five times. The 49ers didn't convert those turnovers to points often enough but those turnovers ended five opportunities for the Saints' potent offense to score.

And my goodness, that QB bootleg call that Smith turned into a TD run late in the 4th quarter? What a ridiculously clever call.

Again, you watch a game like that and then think back to any Browns game this season and you simply can't help but believe these playoff teams are playing a different sport than the team we watch and support.

~ **Joe Flacco's ass is chapped because people consider him a glorified game manager** as opposed to one of the game's elite quarterbacks. Flacco should really just shut up and go about his charmed life because if he's going to whine like a crying bitch someone might look more closely at his game and determine he's not even a very good game manager.

On Sunday Flacco 'managed' to complete half his passes for 176 yards and two short TD passes courtesy of Texans mistakes. He was sacked five times, knocked down and hurried another six times and did all he could to keep Houston in the football game by nearly pissing away a 17-3 lead. The Texans were throwing for the tie in the waning seconds because Flacco inexplicably threw his final two incompletions inside the last two minutes of play to give Houston a chance.

Maybe 'elite' means reliant on a great defense and one of the best running backs in the league. If that's the case then maybe Flacco is elite.

I personally think he's mediocre at best. And the questions will be answered next week when he'll need to put up 40+ to beat New England. Put up or shut up time for Joe Flacco.

~ **I know fans are excited about Kyrie Irving and Tristan Thompson but** I'm wondering why there's as much optimism for the Cavs as has been displayed the last couple weeks. Yes, Irving appears to be the real deal and Thompson appears to have more value and upside than many experts thought when the Cavs picked him with the fourth overall pick in last summer's draft.

But even if you throw away the indisputable likelihood that both those guys spend the best years of their careers in an NBA city other than Cleveland, I wonder whether fans realize that this mediocre start that has them excited is coming with players on this roster who aren't long for the Cavs locker room. Guys like Antawn Jamison and Anderson Varejao will likely be playing elsewhere sooner rather than later because the Cavs are in a rebuild and will be willing to cash both those players in for future chips.

There's really very little else in terms of young, NBA-quality talent to get excited about. Daniel Gibson has a role as a shooter in the NBA and maybe Omri Casspi and Alonzo Gee decent and long careers, but at best those guys are the 8th and 9th players in a legitimate NBA rotation. Kind of like the player Anthony Parker has always been during his NBA life.

The rest of the roster is fungible unless you see big things for guys like Semih Erden, Luke Harangody and Ryan Hollins. I guess you could envision big things for Samardo Samuels but that probably involves a uniform that will fit him as he keeps getting increasingly larger.

I enjoy watching Irving as much as anyone. That kid has more game than I gave him credit for and I was soundly in his corner in terms of the Cavs taking him with that first pick. He has a shake and a shuffle, as well as an ability to accelerate that lets him get to the rim almost at will. That's a seriously valuable skill in the NBA and Irving's only going to get better as the rest of his game improves and rounds into shape.

But there's not much else in the cupboard and the time before guys like Irving leave Midwestern franchises for bigger markets and opportunities starts ticking down the moment David Stern reads their names.

~ **Who's on first for the Tribe in 2012? I don't know** but the issue has been getting a lot of play here on these pages and around town.

I want to see what kind of shape and frame of mind Carlos Santana reports in before I decide what the Indians should do with the first base spot. If Santana shows up healthy and willing to work then he catches and you still need to address the first base situation. But if he shows up either out of shape or out of sorts in terms of how much work he's willing to do and how much instruction he's willing to accept from the Indians catching coaches and Sandy Alomar Jr., well, then I'm all in favor of playing Santana at 1B and letting Lou Marson, a much better defensive catcher and signal caller, handle a very good (and very critical) pitching staff in 2012.

There… I said it. And I said it despite knowing how much more valuable Santana would be if he were an elite hitter who also caught. I just think Marson is an elite defensive catcher and I think

Santana is right on the cusp of being an elite offensive talent in general (and not just as a catcher). If you have guys who are elite you let them play and Marson's ability behind the dish, on a team built around pitching, may actually be the impetus behind filling the first base hole with an internal option and one that's not named Michael Brantley or Matt LaPorta.

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